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847 In past times the woman was left alone in the *kokhi*, without any assistance, even in the winter time when it is exceedingly cold in the mountain region. She bore her child alone, without even a fire or warm water; and often she chewed off the umbilical cord with her teeth.

There are special beliefs connected with the umbilical cord and the placenta (afterbirth). The placenta is buried in a place where "no human being or animal can disturb it or tread upon it." The placenta is regarded as unclean and in the meantime as possessing some supernatural power, a belief which I had the opportunity of observing in Megrelia. Visiting one of my acquaintances in the village of Tekladi, I found a whole house in commotion. From the bedroom came the cries and groans of a woman in travail. Soon the cry of the baby let me know that the delivery was over, and a young girl came out of the house onto the porch where I was sitting. She had in her hands a pan containing the afterbirth. The old woman who was conducting the delivery came after her and gave orders to the girl to bury the contents of the pan in the least frequented part of the yard, where "no living being could disturb it," and then to wash her hands thoroughly. While the old woman was giving these instructions she was crossing herself and saying in the Megrelian language: *"Goronti dikhuamu skani sakheli,"* meaning in English: "Lord, may Thy name be sanctified."

846 In the *kokhi*[1] the woman stays only a few days after her child's birth. When she feels strong enough she moves from the *kokhi* to the hut of the menstruating women, the *samrevlo*. In order to have access to the *samrevlo* the mother and her baby are obliged to go through special rules of purification. This is required because a woman with a child is regarded as much more unclean and dangerous than those in menstruation. This belief explains why the women of the *samrevlo* frequently object to having a *kokhi* built close to their hut.

The custom of purification which must be observed by the mother and her child in moving from the *kokhi* to the *samrevlo* is as follows: The woman burns the straw (*salogine*). Among the Khevsurs she burns down the whole *kokhi;* but the Pshavs do not burn the hut. After this she takes the "holy" water into her mouth

[1] [i.e., hut; see cat 116, p95 -- Analyst]

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and sprinkles the baby and its belongings with it, as well as the path which she used in going to the brook for water or other needs. Only after this procedure is she permitted to leave the *kokhi* and move over with her child into the *samrevlo*.

The rules of the final purification required of the woman in order to enter her home and community after childbirth are more complicated in detail. Not only the mother and her baby, but all objects used by her during the time of her separation, and even the members of her family, are regarded as unclean and are called *shereulni*,[8] and have no right to enter the *Khati* until the purification presented by custom is performed. The ceremony of purification required after the childbirth for the mother and her baby and the sanctification of her house is known as *sanathlo* or *sakhlis sanathlavi*.[9]

Two weeks after the birth of the child, the head priest of the community, the *khutsi*, kills a sheep as a sacrificial offering to God on the roof of the house. Two weeks later, about the time of the return of the mother and the baby, the same kind of sacrifice is made by the *khutsi*. At this time he catches the blood of the slain animal in a cup and sprinkles the walls, pillars, and door-posts of the house with it. Only after this ceremony is the whole family regarded as clean again and entitled to enter the *Khati*. Prior to this moment the father does not come near the baby, which is regarded as unclean as its mother.

The details of the custom of "purification" or cleansing, as observed by the Khevsurs, may be understood from the following description.[10] After moving from the *kokhi* into the *samrevlo*, the woman stays there from four to six weeks. During this time she is engaged in field work. When she returns to the house of her husband and family, she is obliged to put herself and her baby, as well as all her belongings—everything that she brings from the *samrevlo*—through the process of purification, which consists of three different parts: The first part of the purification is called in Georgian, *matusva;* it consists of the following: the woman

[8] Eristov: 114.
[9] Urbneli.
[10] Bardavelidze-Lomia: 250.

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away the evil spirits, who, as they believe, are torturing the woman. This custom is preserved at present in the inaccessible mountain regions of the Caucasus, and was in ancient times practiced in the whole of Georgia, with the difference that instead of a gun the man used his bow and arrow.

This belief in the existence of the evil spirits attacking the woman in childbed and the new-born baby prevails among all groups of the Georgian Highlanders. Thus the Khevsurs believe that the evil spirits who attack the mother and the babe are small black creatures, countless in number and called *dobilebi.*[11] The people believe that the *dobilebi* live among the old deserted homes (ruins) in the village or its vicinity. Such places are known to the Khevsurs as the *banurani.* The evil spirits (*dobilebi*) annoy and disturb the human beings, although they cannot kill them. The *dobilebi* especially seek women and babies, especially children when they are ill. This is regarded by the Khevsurs as the cause of the attack of the *dobilebi,* which they express in the following words: *"Dobilthashi gekhviv."* In order to drive the evil spirits from the ill child it is necessary, as they believe, for the whole family to observe the custom called *ashlis dashla.* It consists of taking forty-five cakes, or, as they say in Georgian, *samjer khuthmeti,* meaning "three times fifteen" (from the Georgian words, *sami,* meaning three, and *khuthmeti,* meaning fifteen). Besides these forty-five pieces of bread, a special large cake is baked with cheese or meat filling and smeared on top with butter. This large cake is called *satsinao.* All these cakes are brought to the place of residence of the evil spirits and thrown to the village children, who, having been informed beforehand, are waiting by the ruins (*banurani*). The child who succeeds in catching the large cake (the *satsinao*) is regarded as the luckiest. Instead of bringing cakes, the Khevsurs sometimes kill a goat in the *banurani.* In this case the head of the animal belongs to the man who killed it and the rest to the owner.

This custom of bringing the cake or killing the animal in the *banurani*—the place regarded as the residence of the evil spirits—

[11] Bardavelidze-Lomia: 254-5.

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is nothing else than bringing a sacrifice to them in order to appease their anger and make them favorably disposed to allow the ill child to live.

Besides the babies and their mothers, according to the opinion of the Khevsurs, the evil spirits (*dobilebi*) also attack the women in general, and consequently every misfortune occurring to a woman is ascribed to the *dobilebi*. The Pshavs believe that a woman with child is pursued by the evil spirit called *matsuli*, who tries to change her baby.

Belief in the existence of evil spirits who attack babies and women prevails not only among the Khevsurs and other Georgian Highlanders, but also among all groups of the Georgian nation. Such beliefs are likewise encountered among other peoples of the Caucasian peninsula, and far away beyond the Caucasus among the peoples of Asia Minor.

Thus, the Georgians of the province of Kakhethi[12] believe in the existence of the evil creature called *Ali*, which is represented as a beautiful girl with golden locks. She enters the room of the woman in childbed and is able to kill with one stroke both mother and child.

The Georgians of Karthli and the mountain region called Mthiulni also know the creature *Ali*, which resembles in appearance and character the one described above.

The Georgians believe, according to Dr. J. Reineggs,[13] that the evil spirits—the *Luftgeister*, as he calls them in German—attack with great glee the mother and the new-born baby.

The Georgians of Meskhethi[14] have an evil spirit called the *avi-soli*, which enters the house where the woman is lying in childbed and endangers her and her child's well-being. The name *avi-suli* means "evil soul," formed from the Georgian words, *avi* (evil) and *suli* (soul).

Besides these examples, showing the belief of some of the Georgian groups in the existence of evil spirits attacking the mother and baby, similar beliefs are held by all other groups of

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[12] Chursin: a, 50; also e, 26.
[13] Reineggs: 112-113.
[14] Khakhanov: b, 10-11.

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remnant of this injunction survives in the present custom, among 171
modern Parsis, on the occasion of the completion of the fifth and seventh months of pregnancy, when a lamp of clarified butter is lighted in the house by some families. The reason assigned for this is that the fire so kindled in the house keeps out *daevas*, i. e., evil influences from the house.

The Babylonians[26] believed in the existence of the dreadful child-slaying creature, the demoness called *Lamashtu*. Her character was inherited by a creature prominent in later Jewish Demonology. *Lilith*[27] was the head of the female demons and was regarded as the incubus and with a demoniac first wife of Adam, who became in the course of time the demon who bewitched, stole, changed, and killed both children and mothers in child-birth. There were many demons who sought new-born children, but the most dangerous among them was the above mentioned *Lilith*.

Among the Summerians[28] the most dreaded of all demons was *Lamme*, or *Lamashtu* in Acadian, the female vampire who slew children, drank the blood of men, and ate their flesh. This name passed into Greek mythology as *Lamia*, derived from another name for her, *Lam-me-a*.

Believing in the existence of malignant spirits and the danger 789
of their attack upon women in childbed and their babies, the 846
people have adopted such special protective devices as certain actions, objects, words, and even the use of colors regarded as possessing magical powers.

One of the customs used to protect mother and child against evil aggressions is the day-and-night watch.

The first days after the child's birth are regarded by the people as the most dangerous, because the mother and child are so weak that they cannot resist the demoniac forces. Therefore, they are carefully guarded both by day and by night.

The Georgians of Imerthi consider the first fifteen days as the 846
most critical in the life of the child, and therefore exercise special watchfulness during this period. In order to protect the baby

[26] Langdon: 366.
[27] Gaster: 655.
[28] Langdon: 366.

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every night during its first two weeks of life, a group comprising mostly young people is assembled in the room with the mother and pass the nights in games, dancing and music. These nightly vigils have a special name in Georgian, *hamis theva*, meaning "watch night."

The Georgians of Guria[29] also observe the custom of *hamis theva*, but only for one night, either one week or two weeks after the child is born.

The Georgians of Megrelia also have the custom of observing the night watch, which is called in their language *serish takhua*, meaning "vigilant night." Literally the Megrelian expression, *serish takhua*, means in English, "breaking of a night," from the Megrelian words, *seri* (night) and the verb, *takhua* (to break).

Besides the Georgians, the same custom of night watch is observed by other peoples of the Caucasus. For example, the Karachais[30] regard the first seven days after the birth of the child as the most dangerous, and in order to protect the child from the attack of evil spirits the young girls are assembled in the room with the mother and baby, and pass the time in games while watching the child. The seventh night is regarded by them as the most dangerous and has the special name, *stim keche* or *bastiri klangan*, which means "the night of nightmare."

Among the Talish, on the sixth day after the birth of the child, to protect it from the attack of the evil spirit called *Shasha*, the relatives and friends of the family keep the watch-night. They keep the light the whole night through in the room where the baby is, and place a fish net over the crib. In case they fall asleep, they place bread and milk at the entrance of the room, on the porch, so that, as they think, *Shasha* will eat it and will not touch the child.

Besides watching the mother and child against possible attack by the evil spirits, the people resort for protection to the magical powers of different objects. Among them the most important in the Caucasus is plain iron, or such objects as daggers, sabres, sickles, axes, awls, knives (especially with black handles), etc.

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[29] Mamaladze: 155.
[30] Chursin: e, 28.

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Until the mother regains her strength and recovers entirely, she is never left alone during day or night, because she may be frightened by something, as the people say.

After the woman has been delivered of her child, a priest is invited, who sprinkles the house with holy water.

This invitation of the priest and the sprinkling of the house with holy water is nothing more than the process of purification which is practiced in the whole of Georgia, and represents the survival of the old beliefs when the women were regarded as unclean and lived apart, and the rules of purification after childbirth were observed. These views and customs have been replaced by others and forgotten in the Lowlands of Georgia, but they still hold ground, as we have seen from the examples given in the previous discussion of the Alpine communities of the Khevsurs, Pshavs, Tushes, and Svans, although there also they are not static but changing, dying gradually under the pressure of civilization.

In reviewing this chapter, dealing with the customs and beliefs of the Georgian Highlanders regulating the peculiar position of woman in society based on the religious beliefs of the people, our aim has been to present facts, avoiding as much as possible any generalizations and especially the construction of theories in order to explain the origin and meaning of the customs described.

We think that any attempt to explain the origin of the customs in question is, for the present, premature. The scientific knowledge of the subject is still unsatisfactory,[88] and especially in the field of the ethnological researches in the Caucasus, where the science of ethnology is in its very infancy.[89] On the other hand, the possibility of a great future for ethnological investigation in the Caucasus is not difficult to predict.

Expressing our opinion of the necessity of precaution, as above stated, we have in mind the interesting work by V. Bardavelidze-Lomia, frequently cited in this chapter. This valuable work was of great assistance in discussing the subject in question, for which I am cordially thankful to the author. But allow me to mention,

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[88] Lowie: b, 205-6.
[89] Chitaia:
[89] Chursin: d.